

## The Man Behind the Armor

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*In the Name of Allâh, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful*

Salah ad-Din al-Ayyubi.

He defied the odds in an era of darkness. He set aside the criticism of those who called him crazy for wanting to do the seemingly impossible: uniting the *Ummah*, standing up to the Crusaders, and returning honor where it belonged. He was respected by both his friends and foes, and is perhaps one of the few men whose name evokes feelings of honor and pride in the minds of so many people in every era and place. Even the generally anti-Muslim film industry in America could not help but **portray** the honor and righteousness that Salah ad-Din was known for.

We all know of how he laid waste to the Crusaders and had them chasing their tails in the battles of Alexandria, Hittin, Acre, Tyre, Beirut, Nablus, Haifa, Tiberius, Gaza, 'Asqalan, Jerusalem, and dozens of other cities and towns across Sham and North Africa. We know of Salah ad-Din the warrior.

But, who was the man behind the armor? What was he like as a person? What was he like as a Muslim? What personality does it take to carry out such heroic feats and achieve such a status?

In '*al-Bidayah wan-Nihayah*' (13/5-6), Ibn Kathir said that at the time of his death, Salah ad-Din hardly had any money in his possession, and this is because:

"...of the immense amount of gifts and charity and kindness that he used to show the leaders and ministers under his command, and even to his enemies! I've already described this previously. And he was very simple in his clothing, food, drink, and transportation. He would only wear cotton, linen, and wool. It is not known that he ever approached anything forbidden or discouraged, especially after Allah blessed him with his kingdom. Rather, his greatest concern and goal was to aid Islam."

Ibn Kathir continued:

"This is all in addition to the virtues and unique skills he possessed in the Arabic language, poetry, and history, such that it was said he had memorized '*al-Hamasah*' (a book of poetry compiled by Abu Tammam at-Ta'i) in its entirety.

And he was very strict in praying on time in *jama'ah*. It is said that he never missed a single prayer in *jama'ah* for a great part of his life, even during the illness that killed him. The *imam* would enter and lead him in prayer, and he would struggle to get up and pray despite his weakness."

He continued:

"And he loved to hear the recitation of the Qur'an and the reading of *ahadith* and knowledge. He was constant and habitual in listening to *ahadith* being read to him, to the point that he would hear a section read to him while he was standing between the ranks of soldiers! He would enjoy doing this and say: "Nobody listens to *ahadith* in a situation like this.'"

He also mentioned:

"He had a soft heart, and was easily swayed to tears when he would hear *ahadith*."

He continued:

"And Salah ad-Din was from the bravest of people, and the strongest of them in body and

heart despite the illnesses and sickness his body suffered from. This was most evident during the **Siege of Acre**, where despite the massive numbers of the enemy, he only increased in power and bravery. They had as many as 500,000 soldiers – some say 600,000 – and he killed 100,000 of them.”

He also said:

“He was generous, well-rounded, always laughing and smiling. He would never slack off in any good that he did. He was extremely patient when doing good and worshipping Allah.”

In '*Siyar A'lam an-Nubala*' (15/436), it's mentioned that al-Muwaffaq 'Abd al-Latif said:

“I went to Salah ad-Din while he was in Jerusalem, and I saw a king who filled eyes with amazement and hearts with love, whether they were near or far. He was an easygoing person, likeable, and his companions used to try to imitate him, racing towards good actions, as Allah Said: {**"And We removed any sense of pain from their hearts, making them like brothers..."**} [al-Hijr; 47]

The first night I spent with him, I found his gatherings filled with scholars engaged in knowledge. He would listen intently and participate in their discussions. He would learn how to build walls and dig trenches, and he would then do this himself, carrying the rocks on his own shoulders.”

al-'Imad said in '*as-Siyar*' (15/440):

“He would only wear what was permissible to wear, such as linen and cotton. His gatherings were free of vain talk, and they were only attended by the most virtuous people. He loved to hear *ahadith* being read with their chains of narration. He was forebearing, honest, pious, pure, and trustworthy. He would contain himself and not become angry. He would never turn back someone in need or embarrass someone who spoke in front of him. He was extremely kind and charitable, and he reprimanded me for decorating my utensils in silver, and I replied that Abu Muhammad al-Juwayni mentioned a point of view of it being permissible. And I never saw him praying except in *jama'ah*.”

Also on the same page, Abu Ja'far al-Qurtubi said that when Salah ad-Din was on his deathbed:

“I finished reciting the Qur'an at the verse: {**"He is Allah, besides Whom there is none worthy of worship; the Knower of the Unseen and the seen..."**} [al-Hashr; 22] and I heard Salah ad-Din saying: “This is true,” and he was in a coma before this. He then died, and al-Khatib ad-Dawla'i washed his body. He was brought out in a coffin, and Muhi ad-Din bin az-Zinki prayed over him. He was then returned to the room in the garden where he had been sick and was buried in a kiosk. Voices were raised in crying, and it became so loud that even the smart one would think that the whole world was screaming in a single voice. The people were so overwhelmed that some of them were distracted from praying over him. People expressed their remorse at his passing - including the Crusaders, due to how truthful and trustworthy he was.”

adh-Dhahabi said:

“And I never saw a king whose death people were sad for except him. This is because he was loved by everyone: he was loved by the righteous and the wicked, the Muslim and the *kafir*.”

The above descriptions speak for themselves.

This was Salah ad-Din. This was the man behind the armor. This was his lifestyle and character, and it was nothing other than this that served as the platform for the amazing feats across the lands that we remember him for today. It was nothing other than his lifestyle and character that made him the one chosen by Allah out of all his contemporaries to have the vision and do the deeds that would make him such a legend.

And this lifestyle and character is something you find common between all of the legends of Islam we have today, be they scholars or *Mujahidin*. You always find them paying great attention to the following: daily recitation of the Qur'an, studying of the *Shari'ah*, giving tons of charity, preventing a single useless word (let alone harmful or obscene) from coming out of their mouths, and living simple lives free of luxury and excessive comfort. Believe it or not, some of us actually look at these things as difficult, boring, and lacking excitement, and we ignore them out of an inability to comprehend how these would be linked to the heroic deeds that these legends became known for. However, there is no

way around it: it was this lifestyle alone that made it possible for these people to live for something greater than themselves – for Islam. There is no way you can dream of defending the *Shari'ah* if you don't even have the willpower to implement it on a daily basis in your own life.

One more thing should be mentioned: he wasn't always like this. adh-Dhahabi said in '*as-Siyar*' (15/434 and 436):

"Since his time as a ruler, he had abandoned alcohol and worldly pleasures."

"He used to drink alcohol, and then repented from it."

That's right. Salah ad-Din al-Ayyubi – this righteous man who singlehandedly changed the course of history – loved to drink and indulge in the *dunya* before he decided to take on the Crusaders. This small fact teaches us a mighty lesson: not everyone is born into a life of *taqwa*. The great people we love and admire who are out there were not always so great, and this gives you hope no matter how insignificant or lost you think you are that you can become something truly great one day.

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